

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

FEATURE

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### PIKE

Pike are long, lean, hungry-looking fish, leading some outdoor scribes to call them "tigers of the inland watery world."

All members of the pike family are predatory, feeding mainly on fish, but occasionally on small muskrats, mice, ducklings, and frogs. They consume large quantities of food--up to 5 pounds for each pound of growth in the larger species.

Coloration varies but most members of the family have greenish markings on a white background. Notable are the long snout with ferocious jaws armed with fanglike teeth.

Pike dwell in lakes, ponds, and streams. They spawn shortly after the ice breaks up and broadcast their eggs over vegetation in shallow water, usually marshy areas and flooded grasslands, and the eggs and young receive no parental care.

The eggs of the pikes hatch in 2 to 3 weeks and the fry start feeding within 2 weeks. When the fish attain a length of 2 to 3 inches the diet changes from invertebrate animals to fish. Growth is rapid in the first years--a muskie or northern pike may grow to 25 inches in the first 4 years. In the following years the length increases more slowly.

The pikes generally become sexually mature in 2 or 3 years. A 10-pound female may produce as many as 100,000 eggs, but the average number for females is about 35,000.

Members of the family have been propagated for a number of years by the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service and by several State fishery agencies, but it is a difficult process because of cannibalism and the need for live food by the growing young.

Most pike are fair eating when pan-fried, as fillets or whole, or baked. Flesh is firm and white. But these fish are most noted for sporting quality.

The five species are muskellunge, northern pike, chain pickerel, grass pickerel, and redbfin pickerel; the last two are of minor interest to anglers. Each has many local names, but no one can fail to recognize any of the family because of their distinct appearance.

Muskie is the largest, reaching 64 inches and 70 pounds. Its ideal habitats are cool, weedy, shallow waters of lakes, and to lesser extent slow-water streams, but it is found occasionally in deep, almost weed-free lakes. Its range today is south from Canada through the Appalachians to Tennessee, west to Wisconsin and Minnesota and has been introduced elsewhere.

Northern pike gets as big as 52 inches and 46 pounds. Fished commercially and for sport, it is regarded by some as inferior to muskellunge for sport or food, but it has a larger following of enthusiastic anglers.

The northern's habitats are weedy, shallow waters of lakes and sluggish streams, and the clear waters of deep northern lakes. As the only species of pike found outside the North American Continent, it is spread throughout northern and central Asia and Europe. Its distribution in this country is the northern tier of States from Minnesota to New York, but recent transplants have been successfully made in Virginia, Missouri, Arkansas, and elsewhere.

Chain pickerel is smaller than muskies or northernns, about 31 inches and 10 pounds. It is an excellent game and food fish.

Habitat is usually shallow water with abundant vegetation and a mud bottom, but it is also found in deeper waters. It ranges from Canada to Florida along the East Coast and along the gulf coast to Texas. Natural range has been extended by stocking.

Grass pickerel seldom reaches more than 14 inches and 1 pound and is primarily a small-stream fish, although it is also found in ponds, lakes, and sluggish rivers. It prefers quiet weedy waters over a mud bottom. Range is from southern Wisconsin and eastern Iowa to the southern half of Michigan and southward through the Mississippi Valley to the gulf coast.

The redbfin pickerel is the smallest of the pikes, seldom reaching a pound. Its habitat is similar to that of the grass pickerel and its range is southward from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico along the East Coast.

Anglers use live minnows, or troll with plugs and spoons, for most of the species. In the North, fishing through ice in winter is a favorite pastime.

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